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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BOGOTA 003422

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

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SUBJECT: ZAPATERO VISIT AFFIRMS SUPPORT FOR URIBE

REF: CARACAS 951

Classified By: Ambassador William B. Wood, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1. (SBU) Summary: Spanish President Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero's March 31 visit to Bogota, as well as his participation in a March 29 four-party summit in Venezuela, produced positive results diplomatically for the GOC. Zapatero pledged support on the critical issues of terrorism and trade and supported Uribe in both public and private sessions in particular in response to Chavez criticisms of Uribe's security policy. His meetings with GOC officials were largely ceremonial, however in closed-door discussions, Zapatero agreed to bilateral cooperation in a memo of understanding and discussed the plight of Colombian hostages. The visit prompted criticism of Colombia's human rights record and Spain's proposed defense sales by Amnesty International and Colombian politicians respectively. On July 11-12, Colombian President Uribe will make a state visit to Spain. End summary.

#### Zapatero's Visit Agenda

2. (U) On March 31, President Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero traveled to Colombia after the four-party summit with Venezuela, Brazil, and Spain and a bilateral visit to Venezuela (reftel). Zapatero began his visit by hosting a 30-minute breakfast with Spanish NGO representatives before his meetings with the GOC. President Uribe welcomed him to Bogota's Casa Narino with full military honors. Uribe also gave Zapatero the Order of San Carlos award, the highest recognition given to any foreigner, for outstanding service in advancing the interests of the Colombian people. Congress bestowed him with the Great Cross award, and Mayor Luis (Lucho) Eduardo Garzon presented Zapatero with the key to Bogota. Presidents Uribe and Zapatero had a one-hour bilateral meeting followed by an extensive joint press conference. The six-hour visit was hailed in the media as highly successful.

#### Low Expectations for Talks

3. (SBU) Colombian President Alvaro Uribe emerged from Colombia's four-party summit and the subsequent bilateral visit with a neutral statement and pledges to augment regional cooperation against terrorism. Zapatero and Lula's support for Uribe's anti-terrorism policies helped reinforce Uribe domestically and reign in some of Chavez' rhetoric against the Colombian government. The March 29 summit, held in Ciudad Guyana, Venezuela, was originally organized to enhance regional cooperation and discuss Latin American development, according to President Chavez. The Brazilian government recommended that the leaders use the meeting to further normalize Colombian-Venezuelan relations unhinged in January after FARC leader Rodrigo Granda's arrest. Spain, a defense material supplier to both Colombia and Venezuela, was expected to discuss military sales to the region and justify their strategy. Colombian Foreign Ministry contacts told us just before the summit that President Uribe had low expectations for a positive outcome in light of the other leaders' ideological predispositions and views on terrorism and poverty. Prominent daily "El Tiempo" concurred, noting that Uribe would be the "odd man out."

4. (C) Indeed, the original draft declaration of the four-party summit had no reference to drugs or terrorism but did include an endorsement of Brazil for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council and language on the U.S. and Latin America the Colombians deemed unhelpful to the U.S. and them. According to senior GOC officials, Uribe inserted counterterrorism and counternarcotics into the text and excised language on Brazil and the Security Council, the anti-U.S. language, and a line suggesting Colombian terrorism was the consequence of poverty.

#### Anti-Terrorism Solidarity

5. (U) According to GOC officials, both in the summit and in the subsequent bilateral meetings, Zapatero was unequivocal in his statements supporting the fight against terrorism and in enhancing regional cooperation. He also joined Uribe in telling Chavez that he had to change his attitude toward the

United States. He pledged Spain's support and assistance in the GOC's struggle against terrorism and reaffirmed Spain's full backing for the Colombian government. He specifically called on the National Liberation Army (ELN) to "cease and desist" its activities as their violent actions only caused terror and further violence. Zapatero recognized Colombia's right to peace in his March 31 press conference and declared terrorism was never justified. He stressed that any terrorist organization seeking peace had to agree to a complete cease-fire before discussions. All the points concurred with President Uribe's demands of the ELN in the stalemated peace talks between the GOC and the ELN. In the wake of the summit discussions about the ELN, Spanish, Venezuelan, and Brazilian Embassy officials in Bogota traveled to Itagui Prison, Antioquia Department on April 8 to meet with imprisoned ELN leader Francisco Galan and encourage a revitalization of talks.

#### Betancourt's Mother Meets Zapatero

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16. (SBU) Hostage exchange was the focal point of Zapatero's twenty-minute closed door meeting with Mayor Garzon, with much of the discussion focused on dual Colombian-French national Ingrid Betancourt. Yolanda Pulecio, Betancourt's mother, entered the mayor's office out of public view and urged Zapatero to press the GOC to reach a hostage exchange with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). Pulecio has been a vocal proponent of an exchange during the three years of her daughter's captivity, but the FARC's pre-conditions of a demilitarized zone and the return of extradited leaders repeatedly stalled GOC overtures earlier this year. Pulecio left the meeting optimistic that the Spanish government would be able to help her advance negotiations.

#### Defense Sales Downplayed

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17. (U) Spain's defense material sale to Venezuela, which Colombian Defense Minister Uribe decried as a poor tactical move in February, was downplayed by President Uribe during the visit. (A week after Zapatero's visit, Defense Minister Uribe told the media he was "not comfortable" with Venezuela's arms build-up.) President Uribe's comments remained upbeat during the visit and in keeping with remarks he made last fall after Spain decided to cancel its tank sale to Colombia. Both Rodriguez Zapatero and Uribe asserted that the sale of boats to Venezuela was not going to harm Colombia. They added that the sale would actually strengthen Venezuelan capabilities to combat narcotics trafficking through their national territory. Zapatero also announced plans to donate three C-212 airplanes to Colombia and open negotiations for helicopters with Colombia in an attempt to "retain regional balance."

#### Critics Note Disapproval

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18. (U) The Colombian Congress was not as positive about the sale. Congress President Luis Humberto Gomez Gallo pressed Zapatero during his award ceremony remarks before the plenary. He condemned Spain's proposed defense article sales to Colombia and Venezuela and declared that Latin America needed universities and schools rather than weapons. Zapatero responded that security, especially regional security, was a burden that all should share. Senator Pardo also denounced Spain's arms deal in an April 2 editorial in weekly Medellin newspaper "El Espectador." He noted that Spanish sales representative traveled to Venezuela during the height of Colombia-Venezuela bilateral tensions and then Zapatero "shamelessly and cynically" sealed the deal in the March visit. Several members of Congress plan to hold hearings on the arms sales soon.

19. (U) In a separate move, Amnesty International and European intellectuals claimed that Zapatero failed to spend adequate time on human rights problems. Although their criticism failed to receive local media coverage, it could be a foreshadowing of human rights criticism and protests in Uribe's July visit.

#### Closer Ties and State Visit

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10. (U) Uribe and Zapatero pledged to enhance commercial and cultural ties in a bilateral Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed during the visit. Spain is the second largest foreign investor after the United States, and the agreement outlines the intent to promote bilateral trade in the areas of energy, telecommunications, infrastructure projects, tourism, and technology. While the MOU left the specifics to future agreements, it flagged Spain's intent to strengthen economic ties with Colombia over and above the defense sales. Zapatero also agreed to support Colombia in European Union fora, a group that has been critical of the GOC for its human rights record. The EU's increased discriminatory tariffs on

bananas from Colombia, among other countries, may be an area where the Colombians now expect Spain to use its influence for the better.

11. (U) President Uribe announced plans to make a state visit to Spain on July 11-12. He said he planned to build on the two MOUs (to foment trade and combat terrorism) signed during Zapatero's visit. The visit was postponed from the February date when President Uribe came down with a serious inner-ear infection and was unable to travel.

Comment  
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12. (C) All reports here indicate adequate chemistry between Rodriguez Zapatero and Uribe. Uribe's state visit in July offers an opportunity to deepen counter-drug and counter-terror cooperation, and to close on additional Spanish security, development, and humanitarian aid to Colombia. For instance, we already hear that Spain is considering providing -- in some form -- a Blackhawk helicopter simulator that is a high priority for Colombia and for us (to reduce pilot failure accidents and accelerate the Colombianization of our helo program). We will track the July meeting closely and hope Embassy Madrid will do the same.  
WOOD